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ABSTRACT

A description is given of the Regional Partnership Program, a field-responsive, center-specific model established at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) designed to oversee clinical field experiences for student teachers. This cooperative partnership calls for a resident tenure track professor to be placed in a geographic area away from the main campus for the purpose of directing the student teaching program, teaching extension courses and being involved in other activities designed by the university. The model involves six regional districts specifically located across the state in such a fashion as to cause the university to be in touch with all areas of the state. The six regional districts serve as the administrative units for the field program, thus allowing the decision-making process to be more closely aligned to the activities and needs of the field. All partnerships have been developed to allow for the incorporation of a cadre of educational practitioners who participate in the management of the regional center and advise the university on matters related to the total education program. The center-specific component of the UNI partnership program was designed to encourage creativity and to respond to regional needs. Cadre involvement extends beyond clinical field experience activities and cadre members are involved in a variety of teacher education matters. (JD)

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FIELD RESPONSIVE, CENTER SPECIFIC:

A MODEL FOR COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

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Field Responsive, Center Specific:

A Model For Collaborative Partnerships

Introduction

Student teaching has long been acknowledged as the pinnacle program of teacher education (Comfort & Moore, 1987). Universities have traditionally used school classrooms to implement this most important clinical field experience. Unfortunately most of these partnerships have been "marriages of convenience" (Smith and Auger, 1986) in that there traditionally have been minimal contacts and few interactions between the two educational organizations and their respective professionals. Part of any successful venture is its ability to address outside, identified needs. Recent major reports on the training of teachers: the Carnegie Report, the Holmes Report, the new standards of NCATE and the F.I.N.E. Report in the state of Iowa, have encouraged partnerships between colleges, universities and the public schools. The development of cooperative agreements between K-12 schools, school districts and universities is, therefore, a highly regarded expectation. However, this amiable professional expectation does cause conflict to occur. Competition for resources, philosophical differences and the rights of leadership are examples illustrative of points of conflict. It clearly is important to a successful partnership that every effort be made to reduce points of conflict. Conflict is most often avoided in cooperative arrangements when all the participants have a solid stake in the concept. "The most promising partnerships are those that provide benefits for both professors and practitioners" (Goodlad, 1987, p. 9).

The University of Northern Iowa has had a 65 year tradition of strong

relationships with the public schools of Iowa. Through the UNI off campus center concept, a resident tenure track professor was placed in a geographic area away from the main campus for the purpose of directing the student teaching program, teaching extension courses and being involved in other activities designated by the university. The concept was predicated on a close working relationship with a single school district.

In light of the many recent calls for reform in teacher education, the UNI - Regional Partnership Program evolved in the fall of 1988. This new collaborative partnership reshaped UNI's long established field experience program. This reshaping was designed to bring the College of Education at UNI into a new and expanded relationship with the school districts, schools and individual educators throughout the State of Iowa. This new partnership is being implemented with the single focus of making school practitioners more active partners in the teacher preparation program at UNI.

The new conceptual model involves the establishment of six (6) regional districts. These districts are specifically located across the state in such a fashion as to cause the university to geographically touch all areas of the state. Each regional district includes a central office in a large school district which then serves as the administrative hub for reaching out to the surrounding school districts. The immediate benefit is an ability to bring additional school districts into the UNI network through the use of a decentralized decision making process. The six regional districts serve as the administrative units for the field programs. This allows the university to better meet local and

area needs through a decentralized administrative structure that is field based. This allows the decision making process to be more closely aligned to the activities of the field.

Key Elements

The philosophy behind the successful collaborative arrangement at the University of Northern Iowa can best be summarized by four words: Field Responsive, Center Specific.

Field Responsive addresses UNI's need to develop consistency between the six regional districts. From a university management perspective all the centers have been structured to allow for program continuity. Several examples of this continuity include: 1) all centers follow a full semester student teaching calendar that allows for implementation of the UNI student teaching curriculum, 2) every center has a tenure track professor who is responsible for all aspects of the center's operation, and 3) all partnerships have been developed to allow for the incorporation of a cadre of educational practitioners. The cadre consists of a least five members who are professional educators from regional district schools. In specific ways cadre members participate in the management of the regional center, and in global ways they advise the university relative to matters related to the total teacher education program.

Center Specific points out the reality that there are many differences in the activities of school districts throughout the state. Examples include: 1) each partnership structures the student teaching clinical field experience in ways that best fit the districts served in the regional district. This includes tailoring a semester student

teaching experience to the local district's calendar, 2) cadres are free to develop projects they believe are pertinent to their needs (i.e., process used to place student teachers, selection criteria for cooperating teachers). The center specific component of the UNI Partnership Program was designed to encourage creativity and to respond to regional needs. Cadre involvement extends beyond clinical field experience activities and cadre members are involved in a variety of teacher education matters.

Components of the New Partnerships

1. The student teaching network has been expanded through the use of a regional network. Students are still placed in the districts that have been partners with UNI in the past, but now students are also assigned to other "area" school districts. This expansion of the network allows for new student teaching opportunities while centralizing the administration process in one location in the field.

2. In each new regional district there is at least one UNI professor who has overall responsibility for implementation of the student teaching curriculum and for achieving the goals of the UNI field experiences program. The UNI professor fills the role of "teacher educator" along with being a professor to the pre-service students. In this latter capacity, the UNI professor is responsible for the academic seminar that is an integral part of the student teaching curriculum and a state mandated human relations course that must be completed during the student teaching semester. The UNI professor also holds regular training sessions for the other local professionals in his/her area. The professors are

also expected to schedule themselves so that they can fulfill their other professorial responsibilities of research and service.

3. In six of the regional districts, the university has purchased approximately one-half of the contract of a local district professional who serves as a clinical supervisor for the UNI student teachers placed in the regional district. The clinical supervisor is directly responsible to the UNI professor who directs the program in their region. The clinical supervisors' main responsibilities are those related to the day-to-day supervision of student teachers, assisting the UNI professor with student teaching seminars and fulfilling responsibilities related to the teaching associates cadre (see #4 below).

4. In each regional district, a minimum of five educators have been selected to serve as members of a teaching associates cadre. Selection as a cadre member is not contingent on being assigned a student teacher. These educators who accept an appointment for approximately two to three years are helping create a network of practitioners who are in a long term relationship with the university. Cadre members work closely with the clinical supervisor and the UNI professor to provide input into the teacher preparation program at UNI, and provide leadership for the student teaching program in the regional district. Cadre members are paid an annual stipend for their contribution to the UNI teacher education program. For the 1988-89 academic year 65 professionals in the field served as members of a UNI teaching associates cadre in their respective geographic area.

5. In each regional district, additional teachers are identified and trained to serve as classroom cooperating teachers on a term-by-

term basis. The identification and training procedures are handled through three (3) established practices: 1) procedures are collaboratively developed by the area cadre, 2) through the regular scheduling of the graduate level course, "Supervision in Student Teaching", and, 3) through the development of on-going inservice programs sponsored by the University in each center.

6. The UNI College of Education has assumed responsibility for establishing a special relationship with each cooperating school district in each of the six regions. The nature of this relationship is determined by the needs and uniqueness of the local school district in concert with the university. This includes such activities as the delivery of graduate course work and specifically requested inservice support.

7. A telecommunications network (Procomm Computer Conferencing System) is now up and running. This system was developed as a result of two grants totaling a $108,000 from the Department of Education in Iowa. It is now possible, through the use of a toll free telephone number, for regional district professors and practitioners to be computer linked with the College of Education, UNI professors and any personnel in any of the other regional districts. UNI has established a series of campus based computer conferences that allow all the field based professors and practitioners to be networked through the campus's mainframe computer. The university has provided all the UNI professors with Zenith portable computers equipped for this purpose. Computer equipment will also be provided to all cadre members and the UNI clinical supervisors beginning the fall of 1989.

The new partnership program addresses all the basic assumptions that have been established for the UNI student teaching program, and keeps the "quality issue" clearly in focus. This model takes the best of the 65 year history and tradition of UNI's field based student teaching program and applies a strategy for implementing the professorial role. The model combines the positive elements of direct involvement of practitioners in the teacher education program, while keeping the university in the position of providing leadership for its own program. This model is curriculum driven which allows for consistency of quality. The maintenance of six regional districts provides UNI with the outlets to continue its tradition of offering diverse student teaching opportunities for the UNI teacher education students. Finally, this regionally conceptualized model allows UNI to maintain high visibility with a large cross-section of Iowa and keeps the university in a position of serving the state through its professional relationship with practitioners throughout the state.

What Does this UNI Partnership Program Offer Professors and Practitioners?

1. At least 80 school districts in the six regional districts ~~that~~ now have a closer working relationship with the College of Education at UNI.

2. A network of practitioners in the various cadres across the state who now have an ongoing special relationship with the College of Education at UNI.

3. Opportunities for professional growth through collaborative activities between UNI professors and practitioners.

4. A direct avenue for input from school practitioners into the teacher education program at UNI.

5. Increased responsibility for practicing educators in the initial preparation of new teachers.

6. Increased professional development opportunities for all teachers in the cooperating school districts, (i.e., inservice and graduate course work).

7. Increased opportunities for local school districts to screen potential candidates for teaching positions.

8. Increased opportunities for UNI faculty to reach out and work with practitioners.

9. Increased outlets for UNI faculty to do collaborative research with field based practitioners.

10. An opportunity, through a state-wide, technological network, for the UNI College of Education to assume a stronger leadership role in the preparation and education of Iowa's teachers at both the preservice and inservice levels.

The Regional Partnership Program Summarized

Most reform efforts do not fundamentally alter the prevailing organizations (Glickman, 1989). The UNI - Regional Partnership Program is an exception. The faculty in the public schools are in middle to late careers who have been teaching in their current schools most of their professional lives (Evans, 1989). In an attempt to give faculty

members more participative decision making opportunities some Iowa school systems are decentralizing their administrative practices by using school-based management plans. UNI has not only recognized this phenomenon, but has built its reconceptualized program around it.

To achieve greater depth in the UNI student teaching program, each regional district has established a working structure in a manner that best fits the school districts involved in the partnership. All regional areas have the following structure and programmatic components: 1) leadership is provided through a professorial line; 2) the clinical line (one-fourth to one-half time) involves the use of a local district practitioner to assist the university professor in providing supervision and structure to the field experience program; 3) each regional district has a cadre of teachers who fill a supervisory, advising and resource role; 4) each center has a number of classroom cooperating teachers who provide the bulk of the day-to-day supervision as cooperating teachers; 5) each regional district has established procedures for implementing the student teaching curriculum (including a weekly seminar and the Human Relations component); 6) professorial activities (research and service) are expected of each professor serving one of the regional areas; and 7) each regional district is a part of the UNI computer conferencing network which allows for communications between professors, practitioners, and students. The essence of these regional partnerships is that administratively and functionally the teacher education program is no longer <u>more of the same</u>. Unlike some school-based management plans where practitioners have little input in their areas of expertise, practicing teachers in the UNI partnership can definitely make a

contribution. They know the business of teaching and they now have outlets for sharing their knowledge!

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